



# U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

## South Africa

### International Religious Freedom Report 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 470,693 square miles, and its population is approximately 44.8 million. According to figures on religious demography from the 2001 census, approximately 80 percent of the population belongs to the Christian faith, and 4 percent to other religions, including Hinduism (1.2 percent), Islam (1.5 percent), Judaism (0.2 percent), and traditional African beliefs (0.3 percent). Approximately 15 percent of the population indicated that it belongs to no particular religion or declined to indicate an affiliation.

The African Independent Churches are the largest group of Christian churches. There are 4,000 or more of them, with a total membership of more than 10 million. Although these churches originally were founded as breakaways from various mission churches (the so-called Ethiopian churches), the African Independent Churches now consist mostly of Zionist or Apostolic churches and also include some Pentecostal branches. The Zionist Christian Church is the largest African Independent Church with 11.1 percent of the population. The African Independent Churches attract persons in rural and urban areas.

Other Christian churches include the Dutch Reformed family of churches, which consist of approximately 6.7 percent of the population; and the Roman Catholic Church, which consists of approximately 7.1 percent. Protestant denominations include the Methodist (6.8 percent), Anglican (3.8 percent), Lutheran (2.5 percent), Presbyterian (1.9 percent), Baptist (1.5 percent), and Congregational (1.1 percent) churches. The largest traditional Pentecostal churches are the Apostolic Faith Mission, the Assemblies of God, and the Full Gospel Church. A number of charismatic churches have been established in recent years. Their subsidiary churches, together with those of the Hatfield Christian Church in Pretoria, are grouped in the International Fellowship of Christian Churches. The Greek Orthodox and Seventh-day Adventist churches also are active.

Approximately 15 percent of the population claims no affiliation with any formal religious organization. It is believed that many of these persons adhere to traditional indigenous religions. A common feature of the traditional indigenous religions is the importance of ancestors, who are regarded as part of the community and as indispensable links with the spirit world and the powers that control everyday affairs. Followers of traditional indigenous religions believe that certain practitioners may manipulate the power of the spirits using herbs, therapeutic techniques, or supernatural powers. Some practitioners are considered masters of "black magic" and engender fear. Many persons combine Christian and traditional indigenous religious practices.

According to the latest available statistics from the 2001 census, an estimated 80 percent of Black Africans, who constitute the majority of the population, are Christian. Approximately 87 percent of whites are Christian and almost 1.4 percent Jewish. Nearly half (47.3 percent) of Indians are Hindu, 49 percent are either Muslim (24.6 percent) or Christian (24.4 percent), and 3.7 percent fall into other categories. The majority of Muslims is Indian or belongs to the multi-ethnic community in the Western Cape.

A number of Christian organizations, including the Salvation Army, Promise Keepers, Operation Mobilization, Campus Crusade, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), operate in the country doing missionary work, giving aid, and providing training. The Muslim World League also is active, as is the Zionist International Federation.

## **Section II. Status of Religious Freedom**

### **Legal/Policy Framework**

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Bill of Rights prohibits the Government from unfairly discriminating directly or indirectly against anyone based on religion, and it states that persons belonging to a religious community may not be denied the right to practice their religion and to form, join, and maintain religious associations with other members of that community. Cases of discrimination against a person on the grounds of religious freedom may be taken to the Constitutional Court.

While Christianity is the dominant religion, the law does not recognize a state religion. Leading government officials and ruling party members adhere to a variety of faiths, including various Christian denominations, Islam, and Judaism.

Only Christian holy days, such as Christmas and Good Friday, are recognized as national religious holidays; however, members of other religious groups are allowed to celebrate their religious holidays without government interference. The Government is in the process of reviewing the public holiday system to determine whether holy days of other religions should be included.

The Government allows, but does not require, "religion education" in public schools; however, "religious instruction," or the advocating of tenets of a particular faith, is not permitted in public schools.

The Government does not require religious groups to be licensed or registered.

### **Restrictions on Religious Freedom**

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

### **Forced Religious Conversion**

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor United States citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

### **Abuses by Terrorist Organizations**

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

## **Section III. Societal Attitudes**

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

There are many ecumenical contacts among the various churches. The largest of these is the South African Council of Churches, which represents the Methodist Church, the Church of the Province of South Africa (Anglican), various Lutheran and Presbyterian churches, and the Congregational Church, among others. The major traditional indigenous religions, most of the Afrikaans-language churches, and the Pentecostal and charismatic churches are not members of the SACC and usually have their own coordinating and liaison bodies. The Roman Catholic Church's relationship with other churches is becoming more open, and it works closely with other churches on the socio-political front. For example, a coalition of religious and civil society leaders, including the South African Council of Churches and the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference, released a statement on April 7, 2005 claiming that recent elections in Zimbabwe had fallen short of Southern African Development Community standards, and criticizing the South African Government Observer Mission's assessment for being too positive.

There were reports of killings allegedly linked to the continued targeting of purported practitioners of witchcraft, particularly in Limpopo Province. In April 2005, a man from Dan Village in Ritavi, Limpopo, killed his grandmother with an axe after accusing her of bewitching him. In February, a mob of approximately 90 youths set alight 39 houses in 4 villages in Limpopo, accusing the occupants of being witches. Thirteen suspected ringleaders have been charged and are due to appear in court in August.

In February, six men were convicted in the 1999 murder of a 65-year-old woman, accused by them of being a witch. Unlike during the previous reporting period, there were no reports of killings linked to the practice of Satanism. The Government does not keep records on cases of reported witchcraft and satanic killings. These cases are investigated and prosecuted as homicide by law enforcement officials.

Several Muslim organizations and groups hold views and opinions that support Islamic fundamentalism, but concerns about

Islamic extremism, fueled by past incidents of violence by the radical organization People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD) subsided. PAGAD is an Islamic-oriented organization opposed to crime, gangsterism, and drugs, but it has been known for violent vigilantism and acts of terrorism. During the period covered by this report, however, PAGAD maintained a small and much less visible presence in the Cape Town Muslim community. The police have not attributed any terrorist acts to PAGAD since the 2002 bombing of the Bishops Lavis offices of the Serious Crimes Unit in the Western Cape. No arrests have been made in that case, but the South African Police Services (SAPS) is still investigating a possible link with PAGAD.

Qibla, an offshoot of Iranian Shi'ite fundamentalism, avows a political jihad. It is an ally of PAGAD and has an anti-U.S. and anti-Israel stance. Qibla's Shi'ite radicalism sharply contrasts with the generally conservative and apolitical Muslim community (mainly Sunni) in Cape Town. No Qibla activities were reported in the period covered by this report.

#### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government and civil society as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

During the period covered by this report, the U.S. Consul General in Cape Town delivered two talks on Islam in America, one to the Interfaith Initiative in Cape Town, and the second on the Muslim-oriented radio program, "Voice of the Cape." The Consul General also participated in an Embassy Pretoria program on "Muslims in America" at the Africa Dialogue lecture series hosted by the Center for International Political Studies at the University of Pretoria. Embassy Pretoria also reached out to faith-based organizations in Gauteng province, including the Rasooli Community Center.

The Consulate General in Durban donated scholastic books to a Muslim high school. Two Fulbright scholars from South Africa are currently doing Islamic Studies research in the U.S. In May 2005, representatives from the Johannesburg Consulate visited two Muslim radio stations, a Muslim newspaper, and NGOs in Lenasia, a predominantly Muslim area. In September 2004, journalists from "The Indicator" and "Radio Islam" attended a pre-election digital videoconference.

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[International Religious Freedom Report Home Page](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51496.htm)